

The Botetourt Building

Constructed as a roadside tavern at Gloucester Court House, the Botetourt Building sits south of Courthouse Square on the outer periphery of the courthouse green. The tavern, originally named John New's Ordinary, is an impressive two-story structure built of Flemish bond brick, with a large hexastyle Tuscan portico, and crowned with a cypress shingle roof. A large, rectangular structure with extraordinary details, the Botetourt Building has the distinction of being one of the largest of the few remaining pre-Revolutionary brick taverns, as well as a fine example of Gloucester County's colonial architecture. In its earliest days as a tavern and ordinary, the first floor of the building housed offices, as well as billiard tables, for visitors' entertainment, while the second story room served as a large meeting hall. The rear façade also had a full English basement that has since been adapted into a public meeting space. Directly behind the structure was a smoke house, and sitting at the base of the woods further behind was an icehouse, both of which served the functions of the tavern. While neither of these two adjacent buildings remains, evidence of the existence of both can be seen on the old Sanborn Company fire insurance maps dated 1800. This area behind the building has been appropriately landscaped in recent years.

The Botetourt continued to operate as a roadside tavern throughout the 19th century, although it changed hands numerous times. For example, in 1802, the records of Gloucester County indicate that the Botetourt Building was owned by Phillip Tabb of Toddsbury. Eventually, the building derived its name in the early 19th century as a tribute to Lord Botetourt Norborne Berkeley, the Baron of Botetourt, who was sent from Gloucester, England, to serve as the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia. After serving as a tavern for courthouse visitors, in later years the Botetourt Building became known as the Botetourt Hotel. Two sisters, Emily and Ada Cox, began operating the hotel in 1906, providing luxurious accommodations for both residents and travelers. In 1915, they purchased the building and implemented a number of renovations that altered the appearance of the hotel.

Gloucester County purchased the Botetourt in 1965 for a sum of \$35,000 and, after spending \$134,000 for renovations and repairs, moved a variety of county offices and the county administrator there. In order to reveal the structure's historic, eighteenth century exterior, the county removed a carport addition, as well as the whitewash that covered the original red brick facade. The building was renamed the Botetourt Administration Building. To honor the county's efforts toward preservation and adaptive reuse of the Botetourt Building, in 1971 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities presented Gloucester County with its first Award for Historic Preservation. In 2000, the building was again refurbished for its new use as the Gloucester County Museum of History and Visitor Information Center, opening during the ever-popular Daffodil Festival (and parade) that takes place on Main Street every April.

Visitors can enjoy learning about Gloucester's various roles throughout history in the Museum of History. The Botetourt Building is a historically intact structure, with working fireplaces, original pegs, large modillions on the cornice on the front and rear facades, and a steep, slate-shingled gable with two wide interior end chimneys. Although the interior has been greatly altered to adapt the building to its various functions throughout history, many fine period details have been preserved, adding greatly to the building's historic integrity. Citizens interested in touring or experiencing the regularly changing

historic exhibits may visit the Botetourt Building weekly Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., and on Saturday, 12 noon to 4 pm. Interested visitors may call (804) 693-1234 for further information.